

The Career and ‘Revolt’ of Gildo, *comes et magister utriusque militiae per Africam* (c. 385-398 CE)*

The so-called ‘revolt’ of Gildo in 397-398 was the first significant case of violent dissidence by a high-ranking western Roman officer during the reign of Honorius (393-423).¹ This article will re-examine his career from the perspective of the changing relationship between military and imperial authority. Gildo did not try to usurp the imperial power himself, nor to set up someone else as emperor, which had been the traditional paradigm for opposition. Instead, this article will demonstrate that he was rather the first senior commander in the western empire who tried to increase his political power by challenging the *generalissimo*, i.e. the recent phenomenon of a dominant general acting as the power behind the throne.²



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¹ All dates are CE unless noted otherwise.

² For general surveys on Roman generals in this era, cf. A. DEMANDT, *Magister Militum*, in *RE Suppl.* XII, p. 553–790; J.M. O’FLYNN, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire*, Edmonton, 1983; A. D. LEE, *From Rome to Byzantium AD 363 to 565: The Transformation of Ancient Rome*, Edinburgh, 2013, p. 81–97. For current scholarship on Gildo, cf. H.-J. DIESNER, *Gildos Herrschaft und Niederlage bei Theveste*, in *Klio* 40, 1962, p. 178–86; S.I. OOST, *Count Gildo and Theodosius*, in *CPh* 57, 1962, p. 27–30; A. CAMERON, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius*, Oxford, 1970, *passim*; T. KOTULA, *Der Aufstand des Afrikaners Gildo und seine Nachwirkungen*, in *Altertum* 18, 1972, p. 167–176; C. GEBBIA, *Ancora sulle ‘rivolte’ di Firmo e Gildone*, in *L’Africa romana* 5, 1988, p. 117–129; Y. MODÉLAN, *Gildon, les Maures et l’Afrique*, in *MÉFRA* 101 (2), 1989, p. 821–872; D. GAGGERO, *I riflessi africani delle usurpazioni di Magno Massimo ed Eugenio*, in *L’Africa romana* 12 (3), 1998, p. 1521–1532; C. MELANI, *‘Mascezel’ ed Gildone: politiche tribali e governo di Roma nell’Africa romana*, in *L’Africa romana* 12 (3), 1998, p. 1489–1502; A. BLACKHURST, *The House of Nubel: Rebels or Players?*, in A.H. MERRILLS (ed.), *Vandals, Romans and Berbers. New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa*, Aldershot, 2004, p. 59–76; A. SCHEITHAUER, *Gildo und seine Revolte im Spiegel der Dichtungen Claudians*, in A. HORNING / C. JÄKEL / W. SCHUBERT (eds.), *Studia Humanitas ac Litterarum Trifolium Heidelbergensi dedicata. Festschrift für Eckhard Christmann, Wilfried Edelmaier und Rudolf Kettman*, Frankfurt am Main,

It will show that he pursued a policy of opposition, trying to undermine the authority of the *magister peditum praesentalis* Stilicho, by withdrawing his support to the latter during a critical campaign, thereby willing to incur the risk of armed conflict, yet ultimately still trying to be part of the legitimate dynastic framework. While Gildo's actions at the end of the fourth century have traditionally been interpreted in radical terms, it will be demonstrated that the context for his position at this junction suggests far more conservative aims.

1. *Gildo's early career*

Gildo makes his first appearance within the surviving sources during the final years of the reign of Valentinian I (364-375).³ Not much can be said about his early life, except that he was one of the many sons of a certain Nubel who was both a native Mauri clan leader and an imperial officer, the *praepositus* of the *equites armigeri iuniores*.⁴ Gildo fought on the imperial side during the revolt by his brother Firmus, so that when the elder Theodosius landed in Africa in 373, he entrusted him with the task of arresting Vincentius, *uicarius* of the *comes Africae* Romanus, and the two rebel leaders Belles and Fericius.⁵ He is not attested again before his appointment as *comes Africae* in 385 or 386.⁶

Hostile propaganda, especially the vituperation *De Bello Gildonico* composed by the court panegyrist Claudian, has left us with a very muddled picture of Gildo's career. It is important to clarify, first, to which emperor Gildo owed his appointment, in order to determine his allegiance in the rapidly shifting political context of the mid-380s and early 390s. There seem to be some links between Gildo and Magnus Maximus, to the extent some scholars believe the latter might have aided Gildo's appointment.⁷ Ammianus describes Gildo operating in association with an otherwise unmentioned 'Maximus', who is probably identical to the usurper since we know that Maximus did indeed serve under Theodosius 'the Elder' during his African campaign.⁸ Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the first troops to desert Gratian at Paris in 383 were his Mauri

2004, p. 309-327; B.D. SHAW, *Sacred Violence. African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, Cambridge, 2011, *passim*.

³ PLRE 1: 'Gildo', 395-396.

⁴ PLRE 1: 'Nubel', 633-634.

⁵ AMM. MARC. XXIX, 5, 6; XXI, 24.

⁶ The date is derived from CLAUD., *Gild.*, 154-155 which depicts an exhausted Africa decrying: *iam solis habena bis senas torquent hiemes, ceruicibus ex quo haeret triste iugum* ("Twelve courses has the sun's chariot run since first I wore this sorry yoke.") Since he revolted in 397, this dates his appointment to c. 385.

⁷ B.H. WARMINGTON, *The North African provinces from Diocletian to the Vandal Conquest*, Cambridge, 1954, p. 11; M. TILLEY, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World*, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 132. BLACKHURST, *House of Nubel* [n. 2], p. 67 supposes it was a compromise between Maximus and Theodosius.

⁸ PLRE 1: 'Magnus Maximus 39', 588. AMM. MARC. XXIX, 5, 21.

cavalry, suggesting that Maximus' name still meant something there several years later.⁹ More importantly, several inscriptions attest that Maximus was recognized as emperor in Africa.¹⁰ Next, a papyrus indicates that, during Theodosius' upcoming campaign against Maximus, an eastern Roman army was prepared to board in Egypt for a mission to Africa.¹¹ Finally, the panegyrist Pacatus claims that Maximus drained Africa during his rule.¹²

However, none of this proves that Gildo was appointed by Maximus. For example, that Maximus was recognized as emperor in Africa during Gildo's tenure as *comes Africae* proves little in itself, since Theodosius himself had acknowledged Maximus as a legitimate colleague c.384-387.¹³ As for Pacatus' remark, that may well refer to exactions that Maximus was entitled to make as part of the initial peace c.384-87 when he was still recognized as a legitimate emperor. Since the evidence for any sort of alliance between Maximus and Gildo is tenuous, the most reasonable conclusion, given that Africa belonged to the Italian praefecture, is that it was Valentinian II who originally appointed Gildo as *comes Africae*, possibly after consulting with Theodosius. One should not forget that Theodosius had campaigned with his father against Firmus, and had probably met Gildo at this time. If nothing else, his record of loyalty at this time, choosing to side with the empire against his brothers surely recommended him to Theodosius as a man to whom loyalty meant something.

There is better evidence for Gildo's position during Eugenius' usurpation. While Claudian remains silent on his activities during Maximus' usurpation, he denounces him as a traitor for not having come to Theodosius' aid during the civil war with this second western usurper.¹⁴ However, even Claudian has to concede that Gildo had not been openly disloyal towards Theodosius. More importantly, other evidence suggests that Gildo did remain loyal to Theodosius during Eugenius' revolt. For example, although Africa traditionally belonged to the Italian praefecture, the evidence of the legal codes indicates that it took

⁹ Zos., *H.N.* IV, 35, 5.

¹⁰ *CIL* VIII, 11025; *CIL* VIII, 23968; *CIL* VIII, 23969; *CIL* VIII, 26267. C.E.V. NIXON / B.S. RODGERS, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors. The Panegyrici Latini: Introduction, Translation and Historical Commentary*, Berkeley, 1994, p. 505, n. 136 and H. LEPPIN, *Theodosius der Grosse*, Darmstadt, 2003, p. 103 see this as disloyalty to Theodosius and Valentinian. Nixon and Rodgers mention SYMM., *Ep.*, II, 6 who speaks about a diversion of the African grain fleet away from Rome. The date is unclear, though they suppose it happened in 383. At this point, however, Gildo was definitely not yet *comes Africae*.

¹¹ *PLips.* I, 63 (14 June 388), cited in OOST, *Count Gildo and Theodosius* [n. 2], p. 28.

¹² PACAT., II, 38.

¹³ Maximus' praetorian prefect Evodius was recognized as consul for 386 by the east (*CLRE* 307). Also mentioned in *CTh* IX, 34, 9; IX, 34, 19. Theodosius' own praetorian prefect, Cynegius, even announced the joint rule of both emperors in Egypt whilst displaying images of Maximus (Zos., *H.N.* IV, 37, 3).

¹⁴ CLAUD., *Gild.* 251-257.

orders from Constantinopolitan administrators during Eugenius' reign.¹⁵ Furthermore, continued loyalty is suggested by the fact that Theodosius married Nebridius, a nephew of his first wife Aelia Flacilla, to Gildo's daughter Salvina.¹⁶ Jerome even reports that the marriage was meant to guarantee Africa's loyalty to the eastern emperor.¹⁷ Nor was this an unusual manoeuvre by Theodosius who consistently sought to tie his senior generals to his house through marriage alliances.¹⁸ For Gildo, however, it meant that his family suddenly became part of the imperial dynasty. Furthermore, Gildo himself was promoted to the status of *magister utriusque militiae per Africam* by 393 at the latest.¹⁹ Since he is the only individual ever to have held this position, it is probable that it was specifically created in order to induce him to remain loyal to the east during the conflict with Eugenius.²⁰

A few details help further elucidate Gildo's position during the usurpations of Magnus Maximus and Eugenius. It has been suggested that Gildo was responsible for the victory in Sicily mentioned by Ambrose when listing Maximus' defeats.²¹ However, the fact that Theodosius sent Maximus' head for display to Carthage after his execution suggests that he felt it necessary to remind

¹⁵ A. COSKUN, *Theodosius, Eugenius un Afrika: zur divisio imperii 392-394 n.Chr.*, in *RSA* 32, 2002, p. 223-236; P. MARAVAL, *Théodose le Grand. Le pouvoir et la foi*, Paris, 2009, p. 272, n. 35. The eastern praetorian prefect Apodemius (*PLRE* 1: 'Apodemius 3', 82-3) was given jurisdiction over Illyricum and Africa during Eugenius' usurpation.

¹⁶ *PLRE* 1: 'Saluina', 799.

¹⁷ *HIER.*, *Ep.* LXXIX, 2.

¹⁸ J.H.W.G. LIEBESCHUETZ, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom*, Oxford, 1990, p. 24.

¹⁹ *CTh.* IX, 7, 9: *Gildoni comiti et magistro utriusque militiae per Africam*. The decree was given at Constantinople on 30 December 393, in the names of Theodosius, Arcadius, and Honorius.

²⁰ DEMANDT, *Magister Militum* [n. 2], p. 719. After the reforms of Constantine I, the *comes Africae* became the senior commander of the field army in Africa, cf. A.H.M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, 1964, p. 124-125; D. HOFFMANN, *Die Heeresorganisation des römischen Afrika im vierten Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, in H.J. DIESNER / H. BARTH / H. ZIMMERMANN (eds.), *Afrika und Rom in der Antike*, Halle, Wittenberg, 1968, p. 237-244. O'FLYNN, *Generalissimos* [n. 2], p. 36; GAGGERO, *I riflessi africani* [n. 2], p. 1523; D. POTTER, *The Roman Empire at Bay: AD 180-395*, London / New York, 2004, p. 551 and R.M. ERRINGTON, *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius*, Chapel Hill, 2006, p. 74 believe that Gildo already held the title of *MVM per Africam* by 385. However, given that Gildo is the only man to have ever carried this unique title, this cannot be taken for granted. The *comes Africae* was already the highest military official in Africa. In the relatively 'peaceful' year 385, there was no immediate need to appoint Gildo to an even higher position.

²¹ AMBR., *Ep.* LXX (XLIV), 23. D. WOODS, *Theodosius I (379-395 AD)*, 1999, on: www.luc.edu/roman-emperors/theo1.htm (peer reviewed essay). To the best of my knowledge, Woods remains the only scholar who has made this suggestion.

the African provinces where their allegiance belonged.²² In fact, the suggestion that Gildo did not send direct military support to the dynastic camp during the civil war with Maximus, helps us understand why Eugenius left him alone in Africa. Gildo did not recognize him as *Augustus*, and looked to Constantinople for orders, but that is as far as his opposition went. The key point is that the African grain fleets to Rome were never interrupted during either usurpation; hence Maximus and Eugenius were willing to tolerate the passive hostility of Gildo whilst focussing their efforts on the more immediate threat posed by Theodosius. But what were Gildo's real options? A point rarely considered in modern scholarship is what military strategies were available to a senior commander in Africa who had to choose the eastern side during a civil war with the imperial west.

The position of Africa during Julian's usurpation (360-361) provides an interesting precedent. The eastern emperor Constantius II sent his *notarius* Gaudentius to Africa, and he was able to keep it loyal to the east.²³ The *comes Africae* Cretio then gathered his best units, supported by Mauretanian skirmishers, and used these to guard against invasion from the west. Ammianus speaks highly of this plan since, as long as Constantius lived, Julian was not able to take hold of Africa even though a strike force in Sicily was standing by to cross over if such an opportunity had presented itself.²⁴ The victory obtained in Sicily in 388 could have been achieved by either Valentinian II's fleet or by the army launched from Egypt, while Gildo probably followed the same defensive strategy as Cretio earlier.²⁵ Such a passive strategy, deemed sufficient by Constantius II in 360, may also have satisfied Theodosius I.²⁶ The most important point for now is that Gildo was left in peace in the aftermath of Theodosius' victory in 394, both by Theodosius himself and by Honorius. This confirms their confidence in Gildo's loyalty to their dynasty, at least until this point.²⁷

²² OLYMPIOD. *Fr.* 20; GAGGERO, *I riflessi africani* [n. 2], p. 1525.

²³ AMM. MARC. XXI, 7, 2-3.

²⁴ AMM. MARC. XXI, 7, 4-5. During the usurpation of Attalus in 409-410, a similar tactic was adopted by the *comes Africae* Heraclian who shut down the African ports and guarded them with his soldiers (SOZOM. IX, 8, 37-39; ZOS., *H.N.* VI, 11, 1).

²⁵ GAGGERO, *I riflessi africani* [n. 2], p. 1527 remarks that this does not exclude the possibility that the Egyptian fleet first passed by Africa, to 'remind' Gildo which party represented the legitimate side. It is not unlikely that Gildo may have lent aid on this occasion by letting the eastern navy harbour in Africa and sending provisions.

²⁶ *Contra* LEPPIN, *Theodosius* [n. 10], p. 215 who regards Gildo's stance during the war against Eugenius as disloyalty towards the eastern emperor.

²⁷ S. WILLIAMS / G. FRIELL, *Theodosius. The Empire at Bay*, New Haven, 1994, p. 130, n. 33. CLAUD., *Gild.* 253f. declares that if Theodosius had lived longer he would have punished Gildo severely for his alleged wavering loyalty during the conflict with Eugenius. However, given that Gildo was allowed to stay put, Claudian omits to tell why his patron Stilicho had him not punished earlier.

2. *Gildo's position at the accession of Honorius*

When Theodosius I died on 17 January 395, the western *magister peditum praesentalis* Stilicho publicly claimed his regency over both of his sons Arcadius and Honorius.²⁸ However, there were several problems with this claim. Legally, there was no such thing as a regent of a properly crowned *Augustus*.²⁹ Yet Honorius was a child, only 10 years old at most, who clearly could not govern the west himself. Arcadius, on the other hand, was already 17 or 18 and old enough to start ruling in his own right. Most importantly, Arcadius' government and advisers strongly rejected Stilicho's claim, and clearly did not wish to see his influence extend into the east.

In 395 and 397, Stilicho organized campaigns ostensibly aimed at cowing Alaric's mutinous Gothic army in Greece, and on both occasions, Constantinople feared this was a mere excuse for Stilicho to march with his forces on the East and seize power in the capital.³⁰ During these critical years, however, Gildo decided to forsake his allegiance to the west. By early 398 at the latest, therefore, Stilicho found it necessary to send an expedition against Gildo after having him declared *hostis publicus* by the senate. Later, his court panegyrist Claudian also composed an epic, the *De Bello Gildonico*, depicting Gildo in the most evil terms. So why did Gildo desert the west, and what was the exact nature of his actions? Both the ancient sources and modern scholarship are widely divided over the matter. It is important to review both, therefore, before advancing a new interpretation of Gildo's behaviour.

First, one needs to establish the correct chronology of events. As Barnes notes, the only secure dates for Gildo's dispute with the western Imperial government are attested in early 398, when the crisis was already resolved.³¹ It must be stressed that there were no signs of unrest in Africa in 395 and 396.³² Orosius provides two possible explanations for Gildo's revolt:

Meanwhile the *comes* Gildo, who had been the governor of Africa at the beginning of the two's reign, as soon as he learnt of Theodosius's death, either motivated by

²⁸ On Stilicho, cf. J.F. MATTHEWS, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court AD 364-425*, Oxford, 1975, p. 253-283; T. JANSSEN, *Stilicho. Das weströmische Reich vom Tode des Theodosius bis zur Ermordung Stilichos (395-408)*, Marburg, 2004; M.A. McEVoy, *Child-Emperor Rule in the Late Imperial West, AD 367-455*, Oxford, 2013, p. 153-186.

²⁹ A. CAMERON, *Theodosius the Great and the Regency of Stilico*, in *HSPh* 73, 1969, p. 276, n. 55; McEVoy, *Child-Emperor Rule* [n. 28], p. 143.

³⁰ O'FLYNN, *Generalissimos* [n. 2], p. 28-36; P.J. HEATHER, *Goths and Romans AD 332-489*, Oxford, 1991, p. 199-205; M. KULIKOWSKI, *Rome's Gothic Wars: From the Third Century to Alaric*, Cambridge, 2007, p. 165-168.

³¹ T.D. BARNES, *An Anachronism in Claudian*, in *Historia* 27 (3), 1978, p. 498-499. The Theodosian Code shows that Carthage was under western control by 13 March 398, when the proconsul of Africa received *CTh.* IX, 39, 3. By 31 July 398, Gildo was dead (*Fast. Vind. Prior.*, s.a. 398).

³² *CTh.* I, 15, 14 (issued on 19 December 395 by the emperors Arcadius and Honorius) decrees that provisions must be made by the *uicarius* in Africa Proconsularis that

envy, as some say, tried to join Africa to the eastern part of the empire, or, as another opinion has it, believing that there was little prospect to be had in the rule of two young boys, above all, because, except from these two, no boy who had previously been left with supreme power had had an easy journey to maturity and adulthood.³³

Orosius wrote about twenty years after these events and had access to good sources, such as Augustine, who had lived in the region during Gildo's downfall.³⁴ He gave equal weight to both explanations and does not seem able to decide which one had motivated Gildo.³⁵ Several later authors writing from Constantinople, such as Marcellinus *comes* and Jordanes, simply rehash Orosius' account.³⁶ Furthermore, Zosimus, who was probably summarizing Eunapius' contemporary history, refers only briefly to Gildo's defection, with no attempt to explain his motivations except to say that he had been won over by the eastern official Eutropius.³⁷ While Claudian has left a lengthy account of Gildo's rebellion, he is surprisingly brief as to the reasons why Gildo discarded his allegiance to the western court. Perhaps this was because such a discussion

no fraud shall be committed against the grain supply. Though this looks like a foreboding of Gildo's revolt, the actual law suggests standard procedure. COURTOIS, *Les Vandales* [n. 32], p. 145 believed that Gildo's revolt started in 396, based on CHRON. GALL. 452, 36. This seems very unlikely, considering the Gallic chronicle of 452 leaves much to desire in terms of chronologic accuracy, cf. R.W. BURGESS, *The Dark Ages Return to Fifth Century Britain The 'Restored' Gallic Chronicle Exploded*, in *Britannia* 21, 1990, p. 185-195; S. MUHLBERGER, *The Fifth-Century Chroniclers: Prosper, Hydatius, and the Gallic Chronicle of 452*, Leeds, p. 136-192. Furthermore, the year 396 was a rather 'peaceful' year in which Stilicho travelled to the Rhine where he confirmed treaties with client kings and recruited barbarian auxiliaries to replenish his forces, after having sent back the eastern Roman units at his disposal when Theodosius died in 395 (CLAUD., *IV Cons. Hon.* 439-459; *Cons. Stil.* I, 188-240). We may seriously question whether the western *magister peditum praesentalis* would have allowed any major dissidence in Africa to continue unpunished for more than a year, before entertaining any thoughts about embarking on a second campaign against Alaric in Greece.

³³ OROS., *Hist.* VII, 36, 2-3. Trans. A.T. FEAR, *Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, Liverpool, 2010, p. 393 (emended): *Interea Gildo comes, qui in initio regni eorum Africae praeerat, simul ut defunctum Theodosium comperit, siue (ut quidam ferunt) quadam permotus inuidia Africam orientalis imperii partibus iungere molitus est, siue (ut alia tradit opinio) minimam in paruulis spem fore arbitratus - praesertim cum absque his non facile antea quisquam pusillus in imperio relictus ad maturitatem uirilis aetatis euaserit.*

³⁴ D. ROHRBACHER, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*, London / New York, 2002, p. 135-149; G. ZECCHINI, *Latin Historiography: Jerome, Orosius and the Western Chronicles*, in G. MARASCO (ed.), *Greek and Roman historiography in Late Antiquity. Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, Leiden, 2003, p. 319-329; FEAR, *Orosius* [n. 33], p. 1-25; P. VAN NUFFELEN, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*, Oxford, 2012.

³⁵ MODÉLAN, *Gildon* [n. 2], p. 849.

³⁶ MARCELL. COM., *s.a.* 398 (4); JORD., *Rom.* 320.

³⁷ ZOS., *H.N.* V, 11, 2.

would not have displayed his patron Stilicho in the best light.³⁸ Whatever the case, Claudian resorts to various stock charges against Gildo, that he was a tyrant, a robber, and a barbarian. He even goes so far as to style him “the third usurper” after Magnus Maximus and Eugenius.³⁹ He initially talks about Gildo’s seizure of Africa for himself, backed by native tribes, and only two years later, after the fall of Eutropius, does he admit that Gildo had actually received official eastern recognition for his actions.⁴⁰

The one element that Claudian, Orosius, and Zosimus all agree upon is that Gildo transferred the African provinces to Arcadius’ government. This is what Gildo’s ‘revolt’ initially consisted of. Therefore, by 397/398 at the latest, something had occurred which persuaded Gildo to declare that the African provinces now belonged to the east, as a result of which Honorius’ government declared him an enemy of the state. So why did he do this? Two traditional interpretations will be discussed, before offering a third view.

3. *The African dimension*

Most scholars emphasize Gildo’s heritage when mentioning him, whether describing him as ‘Moorish chieftain’, ‘African prince’, or even ‘the true heir of Jugurtha’.⁴¹ Several then treat his revolt as a move towards African autonomy, if not outright independence.⁴² Some even go so far as to style him an

³⁸ CAMERON, *Claudian* [n. 2], p. 102; SCHEITHAUER, *Gildo und seine Revolte* [n. 2], p. 318-319.

³⁹ CLAUD., *Gild.* 6, 149, 475. However, when talking about Maximus and Eugenius in later work, Claudian no longer seemed to have had any reason to include ‘the third tyrant’ Gildo (cf. *IV Cons. Hon.*, 69-74).

⁴⁰ CLAUD., *Gild.* 160-164, 191-200, 284-287; *Eutrop.* I, 410-411; *Stil.* I, 277-287.

⁴¹ ‘Moorish chieftain’: JONES, *Later Roman Empire* [n. 19], 183; MATTHEWS, *Western Aristocracies* [n. 28], p. 178. ‘Mauretanian chieftain’: LIEBESCHUETZ, *Barbarians and Bishops* [n. 18], p. 24. ‘African prince’: CAMERON, *Claudian* [n. 2], p. 93. ‘Mauretanian prince’: LEE, *From Rome to Byzantium* [n. 2], p. 84; McEVOY, *Child-Emperor Rule* [n. 28], p. 156. ‘Numidian princeling’: A.H. MERRILLS / R. MILES, *The Vandals*, Malden, 2010, p. 147. ‘African king’: K. WASDIN, *Honorius Triumphant: Poetry and Politics in Claudian’s Wedding Poems*, in *CPh* 109 (1), p. 48, 61. ‘Local chieftain in Africa’: J.J. O’DONNELL, *Augustine. A new biography*, London / New York, 2005, p. 219. ‘Berber chief’: WILLIAMS / FRIELL, *Theodosius* [n. 27], p. 167. ‘Grand caïd kabyle’: COURTOIS, *Les Vandales* [n. 32], p. 145. ‘Heir of Jugurtha’: GEBBIA, ‘*Rivolte*’ di Firmo e Gildone [n. 2], p. 129.

⁴² W.H.C. FREND, *The Donatist Church: a Movement of Protest in North Africa*, Oxford, 1952, p. 44 speaks of Firmus and Gildo as ‘leaders of Berber particularism’. In a similar vein, WARMINGTON, *The North African Provinces* [n. 7], p. 13 declares that “Firmus and, to a much lesser extent, Gildo represented the aspirations of the Moors.” COURTOIS, *Les Vandales* [n. 32], p. 146 and KOTULA, *Aufstand des Afrikaners Gildo* [n. 2], p. 168, following the unreliable testimony of Jordanes, also envisioned Gildo aiming for ruling Africa. GEBBIA, ‘*Rivolte*’ di Firmo e Gildone [n. 2], p. 126 speaks of “un tentativo di separatismo”. J.W. DRIJVERS, *Ammianus on the Revolt of Firmus*, in

usurper,⁴³ even though there is no evidence at all that he ever tried to become emperor, and such a reading seems to result from a simplistic acceptance of Claudian's use of the label *tyrannus* for him.⁴⁴ Alternatively, it has sometimes been argued that Gildo was not merely a nationalist, but a 'revolutionary' or an 'agrarian reformer' also, acting in collusion with the rural masses to expel the traditional Roman aristocracy from African lands.⁴⁵ Indeed, Claudian depicts Gildo evicting Romans from their lands and accuses him of stealing it for his own purposes.⁴⁶ However, this is a stock charge, not to be taken seriously.⁴⁷ Finally, a third alleged pillar to Gildo's nationalist African project, besides the Mauri tribes and poor peasantry, is his supposed alliance with the African schismatic group, the Donatists.⁴⁸ However, Modéran has shown that the only real links between Gildo and the Donatists were between him and a single Donatist bishop, Optatus, and these were entirely explicable in the circumstances.⁴⁹ Modéran and Blackhurst have thoroughly deconstructed the 'African' image of Gildo. While drawing upon a rich literary canon, Claudian invoked similarities with earlier wars Rome had fought in the region.⁵⁰ Furthermore, he pushed the

J. DEN BOEFT / J.W. DRIJVERS / D. DEN HENGST / H.C. TEITLER (eds.), *Ammianus after Julian. The Reign of Valentinian and Valens in Books 26-31 of the Res Gestae*, Leiden, 2007, p. 142 claims that "Gildo's rebellion ... was also aimed at autonomy for the Moorish [*sic*] people." Similarly, M. DE JAEGHERE, *Les derniers jours. La fin de l'empire romain d'occident*, Paris, 2015, p. 105 remarks that "[j]amais les sécessions (sauf peut-être en Afrique avec Firmus et Gildon, à la fin du IV^e siècle et au début du Ve), n'ont été provoquées par un quelconque irrédentisme...".

⁴³ P. BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, London, 2000, p. 226. S. MITCHELL, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284-641*, Chichester, 2015, p. 21. JONES, *Later Roman Empire* [n. 19], p. 966 even goes as far stating that "Firmus and Gildo were not national leaders, but pretenders to the imperial throne ...". KOTULA, *Aufstand des Afrikaners Gildo* [n. 2], p. 168 speaks of "der strengen Regierung des Tyrannen".

⁴⁴ SCHEITHAUER, *Gildo und seine Revolte* [n. 2], p. 311.

⁴⁵ COURTOIS, *Les Vandales* [n. 32], p. 145; DIESNER, *Gildos Herrschaft* [n. 2], *passim*. KOTULA, *Aufstand des Afrikaners Gildo* [n. 2], p. 168 talks about "die Unterdrückung der Possessoren". GEBBIA, 'Rivolte' di Firmo e Gildone [n. 2], p. 126 supposes that Gildo's 'separatism' was economically inspired: by no longer having to pay grain tribute to Rome, an abundance of grain could have been used by the Africans themselves, through which Gildo could have made massive profits and satisfy his African supporters.

⁴⁶ CLAUD., *Gild.* 200-203.

⁴⁷ CAMERON, *Claudian* [n. 2], p. 106; SCHEITHAUER, *Gildo und seine Revolte* [n. 2], p. 312-313.

⁴⁸ FREND, *Donatist Church* [n. 42], p. 220-226; TILLEY, *Donatist World* [n. 7], p. 94.

⁴⁹ SHAW, *Sacred Violence* [n. 2], p. 49 also remarks that Optatus' association with Gildo was far from extraordinary. Optatus was bishop of Timgad, an important Numidian army settlement. As senior commander of the African army, Gildo probably had normal dealings with Optatus in this area. After all, bishops and imperial generals often found themselves in communication with each other, cf. A.D. LEE, *War in Late Antiquity. A Social History*, Malden, 2007, p. 153-163.

⁵⁰ BLACKHURST, *House of Nubel* [n. 2], p. 70-71.

ethnographic stereotypes of the Mauri much further than any author before him, and deliberately links Gildo's African background with that of 'the barbarian' and the 'tyrant'.⁵¹ However, these labels do little justice to Gildo's position. Certainly, Gildo was a Mauri tribal leader, who was able to call upon additional reserves of manpower for this reason. Yet neither element suffices to explain the origin of his revolt.⁵²

Even though Claudian deliberately obscures the Roman element in Gildo's heritage, the latter enjoyed much the same social position as his own patron. Gildo and Stilicho both have in common their ethnic heritage that became a label for hostile propaganda only after their downfall. During their life and career, both surely identified themselves as Romans.⁵³ Nubel and his sons had built up a career in the imperial army, endowed churches and proudly displayed their *Romanitas* in inscriptions.⁵⁴ Final evidence that Gildo's 'Berber heritage' has probably been exaggerated can be found in his last hours: after his defeat near the Ardalio river, he did not consider fleeing to the Mauri tribes, but tried escaping to the east by boat instead.⁵⁵ But if Gildo's revolt was not some form of proto-nationalist rebellion, what was it?

4. *The Constantinopolitan dimension*

After the praetorian prefect Rufinus was assassinated during a parade at Constantinople in late 395, the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* Eutropius asserted his dominance over Arcadius.⁵⁶ During the period 396-399, he achieved an influence over the eastern court comparable to that of Stilicho over the western court.⁵⁷ He even engineered the trial and exile of two high-ranking *magistri*

⁵¹ MODÉLAN, *Gildon* [n. 2], p. 844-847. C. WARE, *Gildo tyrannus: Accusation and Allusion in the Speeches of Roma and Africa*, in W.W. EHLERS / F. FELGENTREU / S. WHEELER (eds.), *Aetas Claudianea*, Munich / Leipzig, 2004, p. 1-9 also demonstrates that Claudian's allusions to Hannibal and Atreus are meant to reinforce Gildo's portrait not just as a political usurper, but as a debauched tyrant as well. For further exploration of the literary dimension to Gildo's portrayal in Claudian, cf. C. WARE, *Claudian and Roman Epic Tradition*, Cambridge, p. 148-170. Similarly, G. HALSALL, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*, Cambridge, 2007, p. 137 notes that "the case [of Gildo] nicely illustrates Roman rhetorical use of the barbarian figure and the elision of barbarians with brigands and other wielders of illegitimate force."

⁵² MODÉLAN, *Gildon* [n. 2], p. 843.

⁵³ H. ELTON, *Defining Romans, Barbarians, and the Roman Frontier*, in R.W. MATHISEN / H.S. SIVAN (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, Aldershot, 1996, p. 134-135; BLACKHURST, *House of Nubel* [n. 2], p. 70.

⁵⁴ ILS 9351; CIL VIII 9255. T.D. BARNES, *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford, 2011, p. 44.

⁵⁵ BLACKHURST, *House of Nubel* [n. 2], p. 72.

⁵⁶ PLRE 2: 'Eutropius 1', 440-444.

⁵⁷ LIEBESCHUETZ, *Barbarians and Bishops* [n. 18], p. 96-100; J. LONG, *Claudian's In Eutropium, Or, How, When, and why to Slander a Eunuch*, Chapel Hill, 1996, p. 1-3.

militum, Abundantius and Timasius.⁵⁸ Although Eutropius had originally cooperated with Stilicho, the latter's second campaign against Alaric, seen as another hostile intrusion into eastern Roman territory, seems to have proven the final straw in their relationship. As noted earlier, Zosimus records that, at this junction, Eutropius sought and received Gildo's allegiance. Other sources confirm this. For example, the law codes prove that the western praetorian prefect Theodorus, nominally in charge of Italy, Illyricum and Africa, only received decrees concerning Italy during the period of 397-398.⁵⁹ As seen previously, even Claudian had to concede grudgingly that Africa was temporarily lost to the east, and he even depicts the spirit of the late Theodosius admonishing Arcadius for accepting Gildo's allegiance.⁶⁰

While others interpret this transfer of allegiance as a decisive step in the direction of African independence, Cameron believes that Eutropius and Gildo were simply acting to their mutual political benefit: Eutropius hoped that events in Africa would distract Stilicho from any Balkan ventures, while Gildo "would naturally prefer the nominal suzerainty of distant Constantinople to the tighter rein of nearby Rome."⁶¹ However, only if we imagine this arrangement to be permanent is it feasible to speak of Gildo aiming for virtual autonomy. Yet comparisons with Africa's position during earlier and future civil wars suggest caution against such a belief. Though Africa was under Constantinopolitan administration during Eugenius' usurpation, it was returned to western administration after his death.⁶² So even if Eutropius and Gildo had succeeded in destroying Stilicho's regime, after which the east could have rearranged Honorius' government,⁶³ Africa would have been returned to the west realistically.⁶⁴ Considering his twelve-year tenure as military commander in Africa, Gildo must have been keenly aware not only of the importance of the region to Italy, but also of the stakes that many Italian aristocrats had in the region. Men such as Symmachus possessed vast estates in northern Africa and any substantial

⁵⁸ Abundantius: ZOS., *H.N.* V, 10, 4-5; Timasius: ZOS., *H.N.* V, 9, 1-5.

⁵⁹ PLRE 1: 'Flavius Mallius Theodorus 27', 900-902. T. S. BURNS, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome: A study of Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians*, ca. 375-425, Bloomington / Indianapolis, 1994, p. 159, 161.

⁶⁰ CLAUD., *Gild.* 229-330.

⁶¹ CAMERON, *Claudian* [n. 2], p. 93. S. MAZZARINO, *Stilicone: la crisi imperiale dopo Teodosio*, Rome, 1942, p. 265-266 regarded the friction between the western and eastern court at this time as "il modo d'incuneare e realizzare la sua politica di autonomismo".

⁶² ZOS., *H.N.* IV, 59, 4.

⁶³ CAMERON, *Claudian* [n. 2], p. 94.

⁶⁴ Similarly, after having supported Theodosius II and Valentinian III against the usurper Ioannes' government in Italy, the *comes Africae* Bonifatius returned the African administration to the west at a time when this imperial realm was in a much weaker condition (PROSPER *s.a.* 424).

changes in the grain supply would have had enormous social, economic and political consequences in Rome.⁶⁵

On a more cautious level, Blackhurst suggests that Gildo was merely “choosing sides in an empire-wide dispute over power”.⁶⁶ Given his allegiance to the late Theodosius, Gildo had stronger connections in the eastern capital, where his daughter and grandchildren lived and where Arcadius reigned as senior *Augustus*. Though the presence of his family in Constantinople may have been a factor in his preference for Arcadius’ regime, this alone cannot have been the cause of his defection from the West. Oost remarked shrewdly that it is hard to imagine Salvina as a potential hostage who could be used against her father.⁶⁷ By bearing her husband two sons, she had become a respected member of the imperial family; she was just as much an asset to them as she was to her father. Indeed, it is very hard to imagine how Eutropius’ regime could have endeared itself to Arcadius by threatening his family members in order to induce Gildo to act against Stilicho.⁶⁸

Blackhurst’s claim that Gildo simply changed sides in a conflict between the two courts certainly has its merits, since, at one level, Gildo was merely repeating his behaviour during the usurpation of Eugenius. Africa would remain loyal to Constantinople and take orders from its administrators. Alternatively, Shaw offers a slight twist on this interpretation when he contends that Gildo was actually a victim of the paranoid court culture in Milan, to the extent that he may have felt that he had no alternative than to transfer his allegiance to the eastern court.⁶⁹ However, neither variation of the same basic interpretation is convincing, for the simple reason that the tensions between east and west never reached such intensity as to justify what was, by any standards, a quite drastic action, possible in a time of open civil-war, perhaps, but not before this. In this case, while relations between east and west were fraught, to the extent that it has even been claimed that there was a ‘cold war’ between them, there was never any danger of civil-war.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Shaw’s depiction of Gildo as a victim of a paranoid court will not do either, since there is no evidence that Stilicho posed any threat to his position before his revolt. In 395, Stilicho

⁶⁵ On ties between Italian aristocrats and Africa, cf. MATTHEWS, *Western Aristocracies* [n. 28], p. 25-30. BLACKHURST, *House of Nibel* [n. 2], p. 73 also believes that Gildo’s policy of transferring the African provinces to the east threatened to disrupt the economic networks between Italy and Africa. While this may have been true in the short term, there is little reason to suppose that the arrangement would have been permanent.

⁶⁶ BLACKHURST, *House of Nibel* [n. 2], p. 66-70.

⁶⁷ OOST, *Count Gildo and Theodosius* [n. 2], p. 29.

⁶⁸ *Contra* LEPPIN, *Theodosius* [n. 10], p. 149 who claims that “... Salvina mit ihren eigenen Kinder in Konstantinopel lebte und somit gegebenenfalls als Geisel dienen konnte.”

⁶⁹ SHAW, *Sacred Violence* [n. 2], p. 47, n. 114.

⁷⁰ A. CAMERON / J. LONG, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*, Berkeley, 1993, p. 106, 309, 333, 408.

immediately set out to deal with Alaric in Greece and would do so again in 397. Given what was at stake for Stilicho with his second campaign against Alaric, there would have been no worse time at which to pick a fight with Gildo in Africa. On the other hand, there is good evidence that Gildo did suspend the grain shipments to Rome in 397, and the fact that he did so undermines any notion of him as a victim or a passive bystander to events.⁷¹ Since Theodosius I had not managed to persuade Gildo to this action even during a civil-war, one seriously doubts whether Eutropius could have done so purely on the strength of Gildo's ties to Constantinople during a time merely of 'cold war'. Therefore, when Gildo decided to transfer the African provinces to Arcadius' domain and simultaneously to tamper with Rome's *annona*, he was unlikely to have been merely taking instructions from the east. He seems to have demonstrated more engagement in this conflict than at any time during the wars with Magnus Maximus and Eugenius. So why was this?

5. The western Roman dimension

By 397 Gildo was *magister utriusque militiae per Africam*, a member of the Theodosian family, and was second only to Stilicho in the west. Furthermore, he had also accumulated a substantial fortune.⁷² So why did he risk all of this? It seems to me that his actions represent the first attempt within the western Roman military to topple not an emperor, but his *generalissimo*. To this extent, Orosius may well be correct when he declares that Gildo was motivated by envy (*invidia*). It is important to emphasize Gildo's status at this junction. After the battle of the Frigidus, he was probably the only western *magister militum* not appointed by Stilicho.⁷³ As a western *magister militum* with a longer tenure

⁷¹ While Claudian speaks in *De Bello Gildonico* mainly about the looming threat of famine (*Gild.* 68-74, 102-104), in later panegyrics he mentions measures Stilicho undertook to counter the annulment of the African grain supply, such as sending provisions from Gaul and Spain (*Eutrop.* I, 410-415; *Stil.* III, 92-107). Furthermore, Stilicho himself publicly boasted of his restoration of Rome's *annona* after Gildo's defeat in a dedication on the base of one his statues (*AE* 1926, 124).

⁷² After his downfall a separate office, the *comes Gildoniaci patrimonii* (*ND Occ.* XII, 5), had to be created in the imperial chancellery to supervise the extensive tracts of lands confiscated. Gildo's case was not unique; one may also recall, to cite just one other notorious example, the case of the Praetorian Prefect Plautianus who after a decade of loyal service in this office to Septimius Severus was suddenly brought down in 205. His properties were so vast that the court needed to identify and collect them via a specially appointed procurator (*ILS* 1370).

⁷³ *Contra* BARNES, *An Anachronism in Claudian* [n. 31], p. 498; M. DEWAR, *The Fall of Eutropius*, in *CQ* 40 (2), 1990, p. 582; S. WILLIAMS / G. FRIELL, *The Rome that Did not Fall. The Survival of the East in the Fifth Century*, London / New York, 1999, p. 10; BROWN, *Augustine* [n. 43], p. 178, 226; M.B. CHARLES, *Transporting the Troops in Late Antiquity: Naves onerariae, Claudian and the Gildonic War*, in *CJ* 100, 2005, p. 281; H. MÜLLER, *Preacher: Augustine and his Congregation*, in M. VESSEY (ed.), *A Companion*

than the eastern Stilicho, and a marriage tie to the ruling dynasty, he may have felt that he had more right to act as regent and *generalissimo* than he did.⁷⁴ Alternatively, he may simply have wanted to weaken and remove him in order to restore greater equality between the *magistri militum* as had traditionally been the case.

By 397, Stilicho had only been governing the west for about two years, and he had not fully stamped his authority upon it yet. He was an eastern outsider, who had marched with Theodosius to the west and fought against the very same army at the Frigidus that he now had to lead himself.⁷⁵ That he had not yet completely established his authority over the army is demonstrated by its poor discipline during the first campaign against Alaric.⁷⁶ The second campaign that Stilicho organized in 397 is especially important when considering what induced Gildo into reconsidering his allegiances. If this had succeeded, Constantinople could have done very little to halt Stilicho should he have wished to march on the eastern Roman capital, thus inciting fears that Stilicho was about to establish himself as the supreme military commander of the whole of the empire, and not just of the west. Hence Gildo could not delay acting any longer.

The dynamics in 397 were completely different from those during the civil wars with either Magnus Maximus or Eugenius. Gildo did not sit on the fence or wait until the last moment to pick sides: this was a pre-emptive strike. Furthermore, by transferring the administration of his provinces to Constantinople, Gildo may have hoped to inspire other officials to act similarly against Stilicho's influence.⁷⁷ There was always a possibility of war, but he may have felt confident that, even if this did occur, it would probably only have had the same outcome as the previous ones: with the eastern Roman government emerging victorious and re-arranging western affairs.⁷⁸ It is ironic, therefore, that Gildo

to Augustine, Chichester, 2012, p. 301; WARE, *Claudian and the Roman Epic Tradition* [n. 51], p. 72; H. BÖRM, *Westrom. Von Honorius bis Justinian*, Stuttgart, 2013, p. 45, who all identify him as merely *comes Africae* at this point. This is worth highlighting since the notion of Gildo as *comes Africae* in 397 would put him in a significantly subordinate position vis-à-vis Stilicho.

⁷⁴ Contra WILLIAMS / FRIELL, *Rome that Did not Fall* [n. 73], p. 97, who assert that Gildo lacked "the clear distinction of marriage and other personal ties to the imperial dynasty."

⁷⁵ McEVOY, *Child-Emperor Rule* [n. 28], p. 154-155.

⁷⁶ O'FLYNN, *Generalissimos* [n. 2], p. 28-32.

⁷⁷ LONG, *Claudian's In Eutropium* [n. 57], p. 226.

⁷⁸ It may be noted that such a reorganized western administration would consist of men who, owing their elevation to Constantinople, might very well have treated Gildo as semi-autonomous, depending on what was agreed upon between Eutropius and Gildo. The *comes Africae et comes domesticorum* Bonifatius briefly found himself in such a scenario between 425-427 after the eastern intervention to install Valentinian III on the western throne, see: J.W.P. WIJNENDAELE, *The Last of the Romans. Bonifatius, warlord and comes Africae*, London / New York, 2015, p. 65-72.

has been branded as a revolutionary by older scholarship, while the primary aim of his revolt was probably to restore the older style of military hierarchy within the west.⁷⁹

Four elements suggest that Stilicho took Gildo's challenge to his position very seriously, and instigated urgent steps to suppress it. Firstly, the fact that he was willing to abandon his second campaign against Alaric, thereby incurring the odium for letting the Gothic leader escape again after having organized a costly campaign, proves how seriously he took this whole affair.⁸⁰ Secondly, the fact he was willing to send an elite strike force to meet Gildo, containing some of the best western Roman units, such as the *Herculiani seniores* and the *Iouiani seniores*, which departed from Pisa in February 398, only emphasizes this fact.⁸¹ Sending a naval expedition across the Mediterranean during winter was incredibly perilous and again underlines the urgency of the campaign.⁸² Thirdly, the fact that Claudian composed three major works during the crisis (*Panegyricus de Quarto Consulato Honorii Augusti*, *Epithalamium de Nuptiis Honorii Augustii* and *De Bello Gildonico*) suggests that Stilicho felt the need to mount a major propaganda campaign to reinforce his authority.⁸³ Finally, the fact that he arranged a marriage between his daughter Maria and Honorius at this point seems best interpreted as an attempt to strengthen his control over the child-emperor at a time that it was being dangerously undermined.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ One may also note here, *inter alia* the references in n. 40, P.G. CHRISTIANSEN, *Claudian versus the opposition*, in *TAPhA* 97, 1966, p. 46 who speaks of "the traitor Gildo".

⁸⁰ E. BURRELL, *A Re-Examination of why Stilicho abandoned his pursuit of Alaric in 397*, in *Historia* 53 (2), 2004, p. 251-256, followed by KULIKOWSKI, *Rome's Gothic Wars* [n. 30], p. 168; MCEVOY, *Child-Emperor Rule* [n. 28], p. 155.

⁸¹ *Herculiani* and *Iouiani*: CLAUD., *Gild.* 421. Fleet sails in February: BARNES, *An anachronism in Claudian* [n. 31], p. 499, followed by CHARLES, *Transporting the Troops in Late Antiquity* [n. 73], p. 284, n. 38 and MCEVOY, *Child-Emperor Rule* [n. 28], p. 157.

⁸² VEG., *Epit.* IV, 39 mentions how the sailing season usually ended in November because of the hazards of naval traffic in winter.

⁸³ CAMERON, *Claudian* [n. 2], p. 95. The surviving source material makes it difficult to establish whether Claudian was under pressure to do so due to Gildo broadcasting his own 'side of the story'. Nevertheless, the exposition of Gildo's motivations in Orosius' history, despite being transmitted through a hostile lens, does seem to suggest that at least in Africa a tradition survived concerning the regional field commander's aims quite different from the characterization in Claudian's invective. Perhaps the origin of these later distorted motivations stemmed from Gildo's own circle. As early as 385, no one less than the young Augustine had produced a now lost panegyric for the *magister militum* Baudo's consulship (*C. litt. Pet.* III, 25). One may also note here the case of the *comes Africae* Bonifatius of whom we do not possess any surviving panegyrics dedicated to him, but who was known to have employed a Gallic panegyrist (SID. AP., *Carm.* IX, 277-279). From the late fourth century onwards, ambitious commanders frequently made use of these poets for their political communication, cf. A. GILLET, *Epic Panegyric and Political Communication in the Fifth-Century-West*, in L. GRIG / G. KELLY (eds.), *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Sntiquity*, Oxford, 2010, p. 265-290.

⁸⁴ BARNES, *An Snachronism in Claudian* [n. 31], p. 499.

When Stilicho returned to Italy, he assigned the Roman senate the duty of having Gildo declared *hostis publicus*.⁸⁵ However, this provoked Constantino-ple to retaliate in kind by having the senate there declare Stilicho *hostis publicus* also.⁸⁶ He then assigned command of the campaign to Mascezel, a brother of Gildo, who was especially motivated to crush the insurrection because Gildo had made an attempt on his life and killed his two sons.⁸⁷ Orosius records the final outcome of the conflict, claiming that Gildo had 70,000 men at his side, while Mascezel had only 5,000, when they confronted each other near the river Ardalio in Byzacena.⁸⁸ However, Orosius has a tendency to inflate army numbers significantly, so that Gildo's force probably did not exceed 7,000. The size of his army can be explained as a result of his command of the African field army, his ability as a Mauri prince to rally native tribes to his side, and the fact that he was probably also able to draw on the large manpower of his massive estates.⁸⁹ Indeed, Gildo had probably benefitted from Stilicho's earlier legislation spurring a recruitment drive from senatorial lands prior to his second Greek campaign.⁹⁰ However, Mascezel tempted several of the imperial units in Gildo's army to defect to his side at start of the battle, and so won the day.⁹¹

⁸⁵ AE 1926; SYMM., *Ep.* 4.5; CLAUD., *Stil.* I, 325-33.

⁸⁶ F. PASCHOUD, *Zosime. Histoire Nouvelle*, vol. 2.4, Paris, 1986, p. 114, followed by A. BECKER, *Les relations diplomatiques romano-barbares en occident au V^e siècle. Acteurs, fonctions, modalités* Paris, 2013, p. 106 and DE JAEGHERE, *Les derniers jours* [n. 42], p. 288, n. 74 and LONG, *Claudian's In Eutropium* [n. 57], p. 11, n. 46 point out that given the traditional conservatism of the Roman senate and its appreciation for archaic rituals, it makes more sense to see them first making use of the antiquated *hostis publicus*. Thereafter, Eutropius let the Constantinopolitan senate retaliate in kind by having Stilicho declared an enemy of the state.

⁸⁷ CLAUD., *Gild.* 393-398; OROS., *Hist.* VII, 36, 4; MARCELL. COM., *s.a.* 398 (4). MELANI, *Mascezel ed Gildone* [n. 2], p. 1495-1499 plausibly argues that Mascezel had already been serving the western imperial court in some official capacity prior to his fall-out with Gildo, based on his connections with the Nicene Christian community in Milan and Orosius' statement that he *in Italiam rediit* after the murder of his sons (OROS., *Hist.* VII, 36, 4).

⁸⁸ OROS., *Hist.* VII, 36, 6.

⁸⁹ C.R. WHITTAKER / P. GARNSEY, *Rural Life in the Later Roman Empire*, in AV. CAMERON / P. GARNSEY (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History. 13, The Late Empire, A.D. 337-425*, 1998, p. 303, n. 104. The imperial government would go to serious lengths to persecute Gildo's *satellites* after his downfall (CTh. IX, 40, 19; IX, 42, 19).

⁹⁰ D. WOODS, *An Unnoticed Official: the praepositus saltus*, in CQ 44 (1), 1994, p. 250-251.

⁹¹ OROS., *Hist.* VII, 36, 7-10 credits Mascezel's victory over Gildo to advice received from the recently deceased bishop Ambrose of Milan, who allegedly appeared in a dream to him. However, the fact remains that Gildo was abandoned by his regular army units at the start of the battle. DIESNER, *Gildos Herrschaft* [n. 2], 183 and KOTULA, *Aufstand des Afrikaners Gildo* [n. 2], p. 170 have perceptively argued that the most plausible explanation of Gildo's Roman soldiers' behaviour is that Mascezel had managed to bribe them during the three day lull before the battle. Mascezel's knowledge of the

Gildo tried to escape after the battle, but was eventually apprehended and executed on 31 July 398.⁹²

6. Conclusion

In order to fully appreciate the nature of Gildo's behaviour in 397-398, the ancient historian needs to negate the benefit of hindsight. Throughout the following decades, one comes across several cases of commanders operating along similar lines in the Imperial West. Both the *comites Africae* Heraclian (413) and Bonifatius (423-424), withdrew support to the military power-brokers at the western court during critical junctions, and organized armed resistance in response without ever forsaking the legitimate dynasty.⁹³ The most successful product of this new military generation was Aëtius who took up arms against the central government on no less than three occasions, yet still managed to maintain a military dictatorship over the western court for two decades (c. 433-454).⁹⁴ The final culmination of this process came with the death of the emperor Majorian in 461, when the commanders Aegidius in Gaul, Ricimer in Italy, and Marcellinus in Dalmatia competed against one another for military supremacy without adhering to the traditional paradigm of usurping the imperial office or creating alternative imperial governments.⁹⁵ Yet Gildo was still a product of the fourth century.

He was an officer who had experienced the strong rule of experienced soldier emperors, such as Valentinian I and Theodosius I. Hitherto, a quarter century of military service culminating in the highest office of his diocese, combined with family ties to the ruling dynasty, would have made him one among equals in the service of the emperor, i.e. the army's traditional supreme commander. However, when the joint-rule of child-emperors was established over the entire empire in 395, Gildo suddenly found himself in a world where the traditional structures of military authority ran counter to current shifts of power-broking at the imperial court. The long sway of Claudian's panegyrics has often obscured

terrain and his ties to local tribes will also have been significant factors that facilitated Gildo's defeat, cf. MELANI, '*Mascezel' ed Gildone* [n. 2], p. 1491, n. 11. However, I am less persuaded by Melani's suggestion that Mascezel's sons had played an instrumental role in the defection of Gildo's soldiers, given that they must have been dead for some time prior to Mascezel's return at the head of a western field army.

⁹² CLAUD., *Stil.* II, 2, 258, *Cons. Hon.* VI, 381; OROS., *Hist.* VII, 36, 11; *Fast. Vind. Prior.*, s.a. 398. ZOS., *H.N.* V, 11, 4; MARCELL. COM., s.a. 398 (4) and JORD., *Rom.* 320 record Gildo's death as suicide. MAZZARINO, *Stilicone* [n. 61], p. 268, n. 1 already remarked that these later eastern sources are not reliable for this event, cf. E. DEMOUGEOT, *De l'unité à la division de l'Empire romain, 395-410: essai sur le gouvernement imperial*, Paris, p. 185-186; PASCHOUD, *Zosime* 2.4, n. 86, p. 119.

⁹³ PLRE 2: 'Bonifatius 3', 237-240; 'Heraclianus 3', 539-540.

⁹⁴ PLRE 2: 'Fl. Aetius 7', 21-29.

⁹⁵ PLRE 2: 'Aegidius', 11-13; 'Marcellinus 6', 708-710; 'Fl. Ricimer 2', 942-945.

that the real revolutionary of the late fourth century was not Gildo, but the former's patron Stilicho who effectively monopolized all western military authority and entrenched it in his position as *magister peditum praesentalis*.

Again it has to be emphasized that at no point during his 'revolt' can it be claimed that Gildo aimed for imperial power or to replace an incumbent emperor. As senior commander of the African field army, Gildo decided to tackle Stilicho, whilst simultaneously professing allegiance to the Theodosian dynasty.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, by taking up arms against a field army sent by Stilicho, while holding control over the regional field army and being supported by armed clients, Gildo himself became a new type of military leader which can only be regarded as a warlord.⁹⁷ While he ultimately failed, many other commanders would follow his precedent throughout the following decades. Gildo's revolt, while inherently enacted by a ring-leader belonging to an older generation of the late Roman military aristocracy, would thus provide a brand new precedent for political and military opposition within the western officer class, which previously had nearly always taken the guise of usurping the imperial office.

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⁹⁶ *Contra* SCHEITHAUER, *Gildo und seine Revolte* [n. 2], p. 309 who sees Gildo revolting against both Stilicho and Honorius.

⁹⁷ On the phenomenon of late Roman warlords, cf. C.R. WHITTAKER, *Landlords and Warlords in the Later Roman Empire*, in J. RICH / G. SHIPLEY, *War and Society in the Roman World*, London / New York, 1993, p. 277-302; J.H.W.G. LIEBESCHUETZ, *Warlords and Landlords*, in P. ERDKAMP (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Army*, Malden, 2007, p. 479-494; J.W.P. WIJNENDAELE, *Warlordism and the Disintegration of the Western Roman Army*, in J. ARMSTRONG (ed.), *Circum Mare: Themes in Ancient Warfare*, Leiden, forthcoming 2016; J.W.P. WIJNENDAELE, *Generalissimos and Warlords in the Late Roman West*, in T. NÁCO DEL HOYO / F. LÓPEZ-SÁNCHEZ (eds.), *Warlords, War and Interstate Relations in the Ancient Mediterranean 404 BC – AD 14*, Leiden, forthcoming. WIJNENDAELE, *Bonifatius* [n. 78], p. 120-121 qualifies Bonifatius as the first western imperial warlord. While Bonifatius does seem to have been the first successful product of western Roman warlordism, Gildo effectively was the first one to have attempted proceeding in this manner. One cannot explain the success of men such as Aëtius and Bonifatius, without taking earlier failed precedents into consideration.